# CHAPTER XXIV

### INFLUENCING BY PERSUASION

She hath prosperous art
When she will play with reason and discourse,
And well she can persuade.

—SHAKESPEARE, *Measure for Measure.*

Him we call an artist who shall play on an assembly of men as a master on the keys of a piano, —who seeing the people furious, shall soften and compose them, shall draw them, when he will, to laughter and to tears. Bring him to his audience, and, be they who they may,—coarse or refined, pleased or displeased, sulky or savage, with their opinions in the keeping of a confessor or with their opinions in their bank safes,—he will have them pleased and humored as he chooses; and they shall carry and execute what he bids them.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, Essay on *Eloquence.*

More good and more ill have been effected by persuasion than by any other form of speech. *It is an attempt to influence by means of appeal to some particular interest held important by the hearer.* Its motive may be high or low fair or unfair, honest or dishonest, calm or passionate, and hence its scope is unparalleled in public speaking.

This “instilment of conviction,” to use Matthew Arnold’s expression, is naturally a complex process in that it usually includes argumentation and often employs suggestion, as the next chapter will illustrate. In fact, there is little public speaking worthy of the name that is not in some part persuasive, for men rarely speak solely to alter men’s opinions—the ulterior purpose is almost always action.

The nature of persuasion is not solely intellectual, but is largely emotional. It uses every principle of public speaking, and every “form of discourse,” to use a rhetorician’s expression, but argument supplemented by special appeal is its peculiar quality. This we may best see by examining

## *The Methods of Persuasion*

High-minded speakers often seek to move their hearers to action by an appeal to their highest motives, such as love of liberty. Senator Hoar, in pleading for action on the Philippine question, used this method:

What has been the practical statesmanship which comes from your ideals and your sentimentalities? You have wasted nearly six hundred millions of treasure. You have sacrificed nearly ten thousand American lives—the flower of our youth. You have devastated provinces. You have slain uncounted thousands of the people you desire to benefit. You have established reconcentration camps. Your generals are coming home from their harvest bringing sheaves with them, in the shape of other thousands of sick and wounded and insane to drag out miserable lives, wrecked in body and mind. You make the American flag in the eyes of a numerous people the emblem of sacrilege in Christian churches, and of the burning of human dwellings, and of the horror of the water torture. Your practical statesmanship which disdains to take George Washington and Abraham Lincoln or the soldiers of the Revolution or of the Civil War as models, has looked in some cases to Spain for your example. I believe—nay, I know—that in general our officers and soldiers are humane. But in some cases they have carried on your warfare with a mixture of American ingenuity and Castilian cruelty.

Your practical statesmanship has succeeded in converting a people who three years ago were ready to kiss the hem of the garment of the American and to welcome him as a liberator, who thronged after your men, when they landed on those islands, with benediction and gratitude, into sullen and irreconciliable enemies, possessed of a hatred which centuries cannot eradicate.

Mr. President, this is the eternal law of human nature. You may struggle against it, you may try to escape it, you may persuade yourself that your intentions are benevolent, that your yoke will be easy and your burden will be light, but it will assert itself again. Government without the consent of the governed—authority which heaven never gave—can only be supported by means which heaven never can sanction.

The American people have got this one question to answer. They may answer it now; they can take ten years, or twenty years, or a generation, or a century to think of it. But will not down. They must answer it in the end: Can you lawfully buy with money, or get by brute force of arms, the right to hold in subjugation an unwilling people, and to impose on them such constitution as you, and not they, think best for them?

Senator Hoar then went on to make another sort of appeal—the appeal to fact and experience:

We have answered this question a good many times in the past. The fathers answered it in 1776, and founded the Republic upon their answer, which has been the corner-stone. John Quincy Adams and James Monroe answered it again in the Monroe Doctrine, which John Quincy Adams declared

was only the doctrine of the consent of the governed. The Republican party answered it when it took possession of the force of government at the beginning of the most brilliant period in all legislative history. Abraham Lincoln answered it when, on that fatal journey to Washington in 1861, he announced that as the doctrine of his political creed, and declared, with prophetic vision, that he was ready to be assassinated for it if need be. You answered it again yourselves when you said that Cuba, who had no more title than the people of the Philippine Islands had to their independence, of right ought to be free and independent.

—GEORGE F. HOAR.

Appeal to the things that man holds dear is another potent form of persuasion.

Joseph Story, in his great Salem speech (1828) used this method most dramatically:

I call upon you, fathers, by the shades of your ancestors—by the dear ashes which repose in this precious soil—by all you are, and all you hope to be—resist every object of disunion, resist every encroachment upon your liberties, resist every attempt to fetter your consciences, or smother your public schools, or extinguish your system of public instruction.

I call upon you, mothers, by that which never fails in woman, the love of your offspring; teach them, as they climb your knees, or lean on your bosoms, the blessings of liberty. Swear them at the altar, as with their baptismal vows, to be true to their country, and never to forget or forsake her.

I call upon you, young men, to remember whose sons you are; whose inheritance you possess. Life can never be too short, which brings nothing but disgrace and oppression. Death never comes too soon, if necessary in defence of the liberties of your country.

I call upon you, old men, for your counsels, and your prayers, and your benedictions. May not your gray hairs go down in sorrow to the grave, with the recollection that you have lived in vain. May not your last sun sink in the west upon a nation of slaves.

No; I read in the destiny of my country far better hopes, far brighter visions. We, who are now assembled here, must soon be gathered to the congregation of other days. The time of our departure is at hand, to make way for our children upon the theatre of life. May God speed them and theirs. May he who, at the distance of another century, shall stand here to celebrate this day, still look round upon a free, happy, and virtuous people. May he have reason to exult as we do. May he, with all the enthusiasm of truth as well as of poetry, exclaim, that here is still his country.—JOSEPH STORY.

The appeal to prejudice is effective—though not often, if ever, justifiable; yet so long as special pleading endures this sort of persuasion will be resorted to. Rudyard Kipling uses this method—as have many others on both sides—in discussing the great European war. Mingled with

the appeal to prejudice, Mr. Kipling uses the appeal to self-interest; though not the highest, it is a powerful motive in all our lives. Notice how at the last the pleader sweeps on to the highest ground he can take. This is a notable example of progressive appeal, beginning with a low motive and ending with a high one in such a way as to carry all the force of prejudice yet gain all the value of patriotic fervor.

Through no fault nor wish of ours we are at war with Germany, the power which owes its existence to three well-thought-out wars; the power which, for the last twenty years, has devoted itself to organizing and preparing for this war; the power which is now fighting to conquer the civilized world.

For the last two generations the Germans in their books, lectures, speeches and schools have been carefully taught that nothing less than this world-conquest was the object of their preparations and their sacrifices. They have prepared carefully and sacrificed greatly.

We must have men and men and men, if we, with our allies, are to check the onrush of organized barbarism.

Have no illusions. We are dealing with a strong and magnificently equipped enemy, whose avowed aim is our complete destruction. The violation of Belgium, the attack on France and the defense against Russia, are only steps by the way. The German's real objective, as she always has told us, is England, and England's wealth, trade and worldwide possessions.

If you assume, for an instant, that the attack will be successful, England will not be reduced, as some people say, to the rank of a second rate power, but we shall cease to exist as a nation. We shall become an outlying province of Germany, to be administered with that severity German safety and interest require.

We are against such a fate. We enter into a new life in which all the facts of war that we had put behind or forgotten for the last hundred years, have returned to the front and test us as they tested our fathers. It will be a long and a hard road, beset with difficulties and discouragements, but we tread it together and we will tread it together to the end.

Our petty social divisions and barriers have been swept away at the outset of our mighty struggle. All the interests of our life of six weeks ago are dead. We have but one interest now, and that touches the naked heart of every man in this island and in the empire.

If we are to win the right for ourselves and for freedom to exist on earth, every man must offer himself for that service and that sacrifice.

From these examples it will be seen that the particular way in which the speakers appealed to their hearers was *by coming close home to their interests, and by themselves showing emotion*—two very important principles which you must keep constantly in mind.

To accomplish the former requires a deep knowledge of human motive in general and an understanding of the particular audience addressed. What are the motives that arouse men to action? Think of them earnestly, set them down on the tablets of your mind, study how to appeal to them worthily. Then, what motives would be likely to appeal to *your* hearers? What are their ideals and interests in life? A mistake in your estimate may cost you your case. To appeal to pride in appearance would make one set of men merely laugh—to try to arouse sympathy for the Jews in Palestine would be wasted effort among others. Study your audience, feel your way, and when you have once raised a spark, fan it into a flame by every honest resource you possess.

The larger your audience the more sure you are to find a universal basis of appeal. A small audience of bachelor's will not grow excited over the importance of furniture insurance; most men can be roused to the defense of the freedom of the press.

Patent medicine advertisement usually begins by talking about your pains—they begin on your interests. If they first discussed the size and rating of their establishment, or the efficacy of their remedy, you would never read the "ad." If they can make you think you have nervous troubles you will even plead for a remedy—they will not have to try to sell it.

The patent medicine men are pleading—asking you to invest your money in their commodity—yet they do not appear to be doing so. They get over on your side of the fence and arouse a desire for their nostrums by appealing to your own interests.

Recently a book-salesman entered an attorney's office in New York and inquired: "Do you want to buy a book?" Had the lawyer wanted a book he would probably have bought one without waiting for a book-salesman to call. The solicitor made the same mistake as the representative who made his approach with: "I want to sell you a sewing machine." They both talked only in terms of their own interests.

The successful pleader must convert his arguments into terms of his hearers' advantage. Mankind are still selfish. They are interested in what will serve them. Expunge from your address your own personal concern and present your appeal in terms of the general good, and to do this you need not be insincere, for you had better not plead any cause that is *not* for the hearers' good. Notice how Senator Thurston in his plea for intervention in Cuba and Mr. Bryan in his "Cross of Gold" speech constituted themselves the apostles of humanity.

*Exhortation* is a highly impassioned form of appeal, frequently used by the pulpit in efforts to arouse men to a sense of duty and induce them to decide their personal courses, and by counsel in seeking to influence a jury. The great preachers, like the great jury-lawyers, have always been masters of persuasion.

Notice the difference among these four exhortations, and analyze the motives appealed to:

Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay! Let not a traitor live!—SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Cæsar.*

Strike—till the last armed foe expires,
Strike—for your altars and your fires,
Strike—for the green graves of your sires,
God—and your native land!

—FITZ-GREENE HALLECK, *Marco Bozzaris.*

Believe, gentlemen, if it were not for those children, he would not come here to-day to seek such remuneration; if it were not that, by your verdict, you may prevent those little innocent defrauded wretches from becoming wandering beggars, as well as orphans on the face of this earth. Oh, I know I need not ask this verdict from your mercy; I need not extort it from your compassion; I will receive it from your justice. I do conjure you, not as fathers, but as husbands:—not as husbands, but as citizens:—not as citizens, but as men:—not as men, but as

Christians:—by all your obligations, public, private, moral, and religious; by the hearth profaned; by the home desolated; by the canons of the living God foully spurned;—save, oh; save your firesides from the contagion, your country from the crime, and perhaps thousands, yet unborn, from the shame, and sin, and sorrow of this example!

—CHARLES PHILLIPS, *Appeal to the jury in behalf of Guthrie.*

So I appeal from the men in silken hose who danced to music made by slaves and called it freedom, from the men in bell-crown hats who led Hester Prynne to her shame and called it religion, to that Americanism which reaches forth its arms to smite wrong with reason and truth, secure in the power of both. I appeal from the patriarchs of New England to the poets of New England; from Endicott to Lowell; from Winthrop to Longfellow; from Norton to Holmes; and I appeal in the name and by the rights of that common citizenship—of that common origin, back of both the Puritan and the Cavalier, to which all of us owe our being. Let the dead past, consecrated by the blood of its martyrs, not by its savage hatreds, darkened alike by kingcraft and priestcraft—let the dead past bury its dead. Let the present and the future ring with the song of the singers. Blessed be the lessons they teach, the laws they make. Blessed be the eye to see, the light to reveal. Blessed be tolerance, sitting ever on the right hand of God to guide the way with loving word, as blessed be all that brings us nearer the goal of true religion, true republicanism, and true patriotism, distrust of watchwords and labels, shams and heroes, belief in our country and ourselves. It was not Cotton Mather, but John Greenleaf Whittier, who cried:

> Dear God and Father of us all,
> Forgive our faith in cruel lies,
> Forgive the blindness that denies.
>
> Cast down our idols—overturn
> Our Bloody altars—make us see
> Thyself in Thy humanity!
>
> —HENRY WATTERSON, *Puritan and Cavalier.*

Goethe, on being reproached for not having written war songs against the French, replied, “In my poetry I have never shammed. How could I have written songs of hate without hatred?” Neither is it possible to plead with full efficiency for a cause for which you do not feel deeply. Feeling is contagious as belief is contagious. The speaker who pleads with real feeling for his own convictions will instill his feelings into his listeners. Sincerity, force, enthusiasm, and above all, feeling—these are the qualities that move multitudes and make appeals irresistible. They are of far greater importance than technical principles of delivery, grace of gesture, or polished enunciation—important as all these elements must doubtless be considered. *Base* your appeal on reason, but do not end in the basement—let the building rise, full of deep emotion and noble persuasion.

## QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. (*a*) What elements of appeal do you find in the following? (*b*) Is it too florid? (*c*) Is this style equally powerful today? (*d*) Are the sentences too long and involved for clearness and force?

Oh, gentlemen, am I this day only the counsel of my client? No, no; I am the advocate of humanity—of yourselves—your homes—your wives—your families—your little children. I am glad that this case exhibits such atrocity; unmarked as it is by any mitigatory feature, it may stop the frightful advance of this calamity; it will be met now, and marked with vengeance. If it be not, farewell to the virtues of your country; farewell to all confidence between man and man; farewell to that unsuspicious and reciprocal tenderness, without which marriage is but a consecrated curse. If oaths are to be violated, laws disregarded, friendship betrayed, humanity trampled, national and individual honor stained, and if a jury of fathers and of husbands will give such miscreancy a passport to their homes, and wives, and daughters,—farewell to all that yet remains of Ireland! But I will not cast such a doubt upon the character of my country. Against the sneer of the foe, and the skepticism of the foreigner, I will still point to the domestic virtues, that no perfidy could barter, and no bribery can purchase, that with a Roman usage, at once embellish and consecrate households, giving to the society of the hearth all the purity of the altar; that lingering alike in the palace and the cottage, are still to be found scattered over this land—the relic of what she was—the source perhaps of what she may be—the lone, the stately, and magnificent memorials, that rearing their majesty amid surrounding ruins, serve at once as the landmarks of the departed glory, and the models by which the future may be erected.

Preserve those virtues with a vestal fidelity; mark this day, by your verdict, your horror of their profanation; and believe me, when the hand which records that verdict shall be dust, and the tongue that asks it, traceless in the grave, many a happy home will bless its consequences, and many a mother teach her little child to hate the impious treason of adultery.

—CHARLES PHILLIPS.

2. Analyze and criticise the forms of appeal used in the selections from Hoar, Story, and Kipling.

3. What is the type of persuasion used by Senator Thurston (page 50)?

4. Cite two examples each, from selections in this volume, in which speakers sought to be persuasive by securing the hearers' (*a*) sympathy for themselves; (*b*) sympathy with their subjects; (*c*)self-pity.

5. Make a short address using persuasion.

6. What other methods of persuasion than those here mentioned can you name?

7. Is it easier to persuade men to change their course of conduct than to persuade them to continue in a given course? Give examples to support your belief.

8. In how far are we justified in making an appeal to self-interest in order to lead men to adopt a given course?

9. Does the merit of the course have any bearing on the merit of the methods used?

10. Illustrate an unworthy method of using persuasion.

11. Deliver a short speech on the value of skill in persuasion.

12. Does effective persuasion always produce conviction?

13. Does conviction always result in action?

14. Is it fair for counsel to appeal to the emotions of a jury in a murder trial?

15. Ought the judge use persuasion in making his charge?

16. Say how self-consciousness may hinder the power of persuasion in a speaker.

17. Is emotion without words ever persuasive? If so, illustrate.

18. Might gestures without words be persuasive? If so, illustrate.

19. Has posture in a speaker anything to do with persuasion? Discuss.

20. Has voice? Discuss.

21. Has manner? Discuss.

22. What effect does personal magnetism have in producing conviction?

23. Discuss the relation of persuasion to (*a*) description; (*b*) narration; (*c*) exposition; (*d*) pure reason.

24. What is the effect of over-persuasion?

25. Make a short speech on the effect of the constant use of persuasion on the sincerity of the speaker himself.

26. Show by example how a general statement is not as persuasive as a concrete example illustrating the point being discussed.

27. Show by example how brevity is of value in persuasion.

28. Discuss the importance of avoiding an antagonistic attitude in persuasion.

29. What is the most persuasive passage you have found in the selections of this volume. On what do you base your decision?

30. Cite a persuasive passage from some other source. Read or recite it aloud.

31. Make a list of the emotional bases of appeal, grading them from low to high, according to your estimate.

32. Would circumstances make any difference in such grading? If so, give examples.

33. Deliver a short, passionate appeal to a jury, pleading for justice to a poor widow.

34. Deliver a short appeal to men to give up some evil way.

35. Criticise the structure of the sentence beginning with the last line of page 296.